TDEM RACES STATEWIDE EXERCISE

After Action Report

Prepared by

H. Dale Durham, W5WI

RACES RRO-8 & DRO-7,

WTX Section Manager

Coordinated With

J. David Overton, W5JDO,

WTX Section Emergency Coordinator,

RACES DRO-9

Purpose:

The purpose of the Texas State-Wide Exercise (SWE) is to demonstrate the ability of Texas State RACES Amateur Radio Operators to provide useful, accurate and timely information using amateur radio communications and digital communications via Winlink Peer to Peer (P2P) to further the mission of the Texas State RACES organization and jurisdictions that we serve. The exercise will seek to improve verbal and digital communications (P2P) skills that result after an extraordinary event.

Objectives:

* Texas State RACES Operators, in a plausible scenario where the conventional communications may be compromised, will first verbally communicate through UHF, or VHF, or HF, a pre-determined information request (see Scenario and Exercise Task (\*) below). Then, using the same information, send a Winlink Check-In Form P2P to their designated Net Control Stations.
* Prepare and train Texas RACES operators to effectively transmit/receive emergency radio communications and transcribe such information into the messaging segment of a Winlink Check-In form using Peer to Peer messaging.
* Determine weaknesses that future training can address.

RACES Region 8 Implementation:

* Include West Texas Section (WTX) ARES members to also participate in the exercise using the same scenario developed for RACES participants.
* ARES reports to be sent to the WTX Section Emergency Coordinator (SEC), with a combined report sent to State Emergency Operations Center (SOC).
* As in any emergency encourage following established “chain of command” and reporting directions.
* Other than the Friday evening Voice Net, Winlink P2P would be the required form of reporting. In instances where RACES or ARES members did not have Winlink HF capability, Telnet submittals would be accepted.
* The RACES DRO-9 and the CLO for Jones County was tasked to be a Relay Stations for K5SOC.

Discussion and Implementation:

* The Statewide Exercise was well planned and numerous discussions and training opportunities were available to all participants for well over a month prior to the exercise being held.
* Each RACES Region/District was encouraged to develop their own Operational Plan to ensure maximum participation by their ARES and RACES members.
* Region 8 Regional Radio Officer (RRO) and the WTX SEC developed an Operational Plan for the exercise. The Plan was sent to all ARES members in WTX Section, and RACES District 7, 8, 9 and District 10 RACES members and CLO’s.
* Prior to the Exercise, discussions were held during the weekly Wednesday Statewide RACES Zoom meeting and the weekly WTX Section Thursday Zoom meeting to answer any questions and to review the exercise activities.
* Emphasis was placed on following the Operational Plan and completing the outlined tasks in the Plan.

Findings:

* Both the 40m and 80m HF bands worked well throughout the SWE.
* Relay stations received some messages that were forwarded to either ARES SEC, respective DRO’s or K5SOC as directed.
* For a myriad of unknown reasons, ARES and RACES participation in the Exercise was below expectations.
* A clear understanding of reporting protocols by participants to both ARES and RACES leadership was either not clearly understood or ignored.
* Several Winlink reports were sent to the wrong receiving stations.
* Many ARES and RACES members do not have Winlink capability despite encouragement by ARES SEC and RACES DRO’s to obtain the capability even if it’s Telnet.
* Additional Winlink operational training is needed by many participants.
* Winlink program and VARA modems needed updates in several instances.

General Recommendations:

* A contributing factor to the low member participation in the Exercise is that membership in RACES in District 7 and 10 has many members carried over for several years that are inactive. Encourage those members to become active or when terms expire do not renew memberships.
* State RACES Leadership needs to be proactive in ensuring that RACES Regional and District Leadership are functional leaders who are recruiting new members and conducting periodic training.

Recommendations:

* Encourage ARES EC’s and RACES CLO’s to continue to train and know their members in their areas.
* Ensure that ARES EC’s and RACES CLO’s understand the Winlink reporting protocols and follow them.
* ARES and RACES leadership should continue to assist members to either develop or enhance Winlink operational skills.
* Remind ARES and RACES membership to update Winlink program and VARA modem in a timely fashion.